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Kingman Reef—at last!

excerpts from an article by Tom Harrell, N4XP, and Garry Shapiro, NI6T

We are told “good things are worth waiting for.” The Kingman Reef DXpedition team learned just how true this famous saying is!

Plans to activate Kingman Reef came after a failed attempt to operate from T31 several years ago. We scanned the map of the Pacific and quickly chose Kingman Reef as a replacement. Kingman was number 16 overall and number 3 in Europe, thus a good choice but not an easy location to reach. Transportation was by ship, not the easiest way to get anywhere. That's why it is still rare, having been on the air only 3 or 4 times. This operation would be different—it would be larger and fully operational on all bands 160 through 6 meters.

Planning started in earnest almost 1½ years before we set foot on the reef that morning in October. Our original plans called for 16 operators, enough equipment for 6 stations and a stay of twelve days. Before it was over we had staged enough equipment to establish a small city. We would load the ship eight days prior to our departure from Hawaii, the ship would sail for Christmas Island, T32, and meet the team on T32 some 7 days later.

In early 2000, the organizers attempted to form a team of operators who not only had experience with DXpeditioning, but who also had lived under the harsh conditions that



The K5K team

the team would face. As the year moved on, commitments were received from WA1S, WB4JTT, KH7U, NH6UY, I8NHJ, RZ3AA, AA7A, JH7OHF, K4UEE, and KO4RR who would serve as our medical doctor. N4BQW, who was involved from the beginning, was having a problem with a work commitment and would eventually drop out. One advantage we had was that NH6UY had been to Kingman before and his knowledge would prove valuable.

By late summer we had finalized the transportation, shipped much equipment

to Hawaii and started to raise funds. We also completed the team with the addition of K5AB and VE7CT. We also had a commitment from KH6ND/KH5 to join us from Palmyra Atoll.

During the planning stages we overcame several obstacles but the worst problem arose when the week of departure arrived: the Navy rescinded permission to land on Kingman Reef. WB4JTT met with the appropriate parties at Pearl

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Harbor, addressed their concerns, and the Navy issued a new permission document. A major problem was thwarted!

Enroute

The team, with the exception of KH6ND/KH5, met in Hawaii where we began our trip, a 2-hour flight to Christmas Island. There we would meet our ship, the *Machias*, for the remainder of our journey. Slowed by bad weather, the *Machias* was delayed so we took advantage of the time to work out plans and strategies as a team. We also made some 1,000 QSOs as T32R.

By the third morning of our stay on Christmas Island, the *Machias* had arrived and we set sail for Palmyra some 400 miles away. For the most part, the sail to Palmyra was smooth and a new experience for over half the team. On several occasions the crew fished off the stern and caught tuna. Guess what the evening meal was?

When we came on deck the next morning, Palmyra was ahead of us. The approach was treacherous but we took it very slow and made it without incident. Our stay lasted about 3 hours, giving us just enough time to "appreciate" dirt and sand! Mike gave us a tour of the atoll including a visit to the wrecked aircraft from an earlier ill-fated DXpedition. At noon we sailed from Palmyra with our last team member now on board. As we began the final leg of our journey, our destination was only 35 miles and 10 hours away.

As we went to bed that evening the anticipation level was building. We knew that in the morning we would be there.

Arrival

No sooner did the *Machias* drop anchor at Kingman Reef, then we immediately started to prepare a zodiac for the first landing. Within an hour all team members were ashore and the zodiac was ferrying equipment to the reef. As the generators came ashore all hands pitched in to muscle each generator up the slope. After most of the equipment was unloaded, team members prepared to start their tasks. But so far, no one realized what the weather was doing!

As the last cases of equipment were brought to shore, several team members commented to each other how windy it was getting! Even though the sky was clear and the sun was shining, it was really windy. At times one had to hold on to something to keep from being blown down by the wind. All assumed this was something that would leave us. Wrong! As the day moved on the weather turned more and more overcast and the wind intensified. As we assembled the tents and prepared to erect them, it started to rain. As the rain increased so did the wind. The sky was looking very bad. Several tents had been assembled but were not anchored. Before we realized what had happened these tents blew away and rolled down the reef with two going into the water. Everyone was racing to either catch the tents or protect the equipment sitting on the edge of the reef and as the storm continued survival became our primary issue. Activity on the reef that night consisted of keeping the tents secured and the equipment as dry as possible. As daybreak came, the weather was still windy with threatening rain clouds all around. We decided our priority was to "harden" the camp to the point where we could get in from the weather which we would soon accept as the "norm" for Kingman Reef.

As the first full day came to an end, all the generators were ashore and in operation. But the weather continued to be a major problem and we were still making efforts to stay dry. The wind and rain continued with such intensity it would blow through the corners of the tents and anything nearby would get very wet with the framework of the tents literally being lifted up from the stakes holding them down. As some team members tended to life support tasks, the antenna team worked on the erection of the antennas. The wind made it difficult but they were quite successful in putting up almost all of the antennas.

As dark approached we still had not put the first radio on the air. A meeting

was held to evaluate our operation. By this time we had lost some 18 hours trying to ensure our survivability. It was imperative our ability to protect ourselves be given the highest priority. After dark several members started to set up operating positions and by midday of the second full day, the living facilities were "hardened" to a point where we felt secure in their ability to withstand the wind and the rain. As last we could turn all our energy to our primary goal—radio!

Breaking into the Top 10

AA7A and JH7OHF worked on 6 meters the entire stay making almost 1000 QSOs. They were able to monitor that band with the assistance of a 6 meter beacon. NI6T operated RTTY and put 1,350 RTTY QSOs in the log.

When the last station went QRT, a total of 80,839 QSOs had been logged with 20% of those from Europe. Many EU stations had made it in the log on numerous bands and 2 modes. This QSO count placed us at number 3 on the all-time DXpedition record behind only A52A and ZL9CI. What made us most happy was that we had done this in only 9.5 days and from tents on a reef with no permanent life support. We were also proud of 3,011 QSOs on 80 and 1,023 on 160 meters.

Thanks to our supporters

In any operation such as this, there are many who help and provide support in one way or another. Our thanks go out to our many sponsors who helped make this a success. We want to offer a special appreciation to our largest group associations—the Northern California DX Foundation, INDEXA, and The American Radio Relay League—for major financial support. A special thanks goes to ICOM for providing IC756 PRO's and to Force 12 who supplied the antennas that made us heard all over the world. But most of all, a special thanks to the DXers worldwide who sent financial support to help us offset the overall cost of this operation. Without the combined assistance of equipment sponsors and financial donations, this trip would not have taken place.

Guinea-Bissau—J5Z by Franz Langner, DJ9ZB

Once again, Baldur and I wanted to put a country on the air that hadn't been on for a long time so we decided to go to Guinea-Bissau because J5 is one of the rarer countries on the amateur bands.

We made an inquiry to the ICGB (Instituto das Comunicacoes da Guinea-Bissau) office in Bissau about obtaining an amateur radio license. The response was positive which allowed us to make final plans for this activity. The travel agency made our arrangements with Air Portugal which serves Guinea-Bissau from Lisboa weekly. Our scheduled departure from Frankfurt was September 16th with a stopover for one night in Lisboa. The next day, TP flight #1125 brought us directly to Bissau. It was a five-hour flight and we arrived in Bissau late in the afternoon (LT+UTC) and started the immigration process. We had all the necessary paperwork in hand and had no problem clearing customs with our equipment, antennas, etc. We received a friendly reception by the Guinea-Bissau people and we strove to leave a lasting good impression for the next radio amateur who will visit the country.

The road from the airport in downtown Bissau is good and after a 40-minute drive we arrived at our hotel on September 24th.

Our first task was to install the antennas: a Windom FD-4 and a Cushcraft R-7000 vertical. We set up two stations, one Yaesu FT-900 ATC with a DAIWA power supply SS-330X and one Yaesu FT-890 ATC.

My first contact as J5Z was at 1715 UTC with WA2WSX on 21 MHz.

During the first two days the propagation parameters were poor with sudden solar storms. The Telecom officer came to check our stations and antennas on Monday morning and after his visit we quickly took our written license at the ICGB office. I didn't work by call areas nor did I work anyone on sked. We took everybody as they came and operated split frequency whenever required by pileup size.

There is still one resident amateur in Guinea-Bissau, Carlos de Silva, J52UAL.



We found his QTH and had a short visit with him.

In the mornings we began by working JAs and the Pacific. As the skip moved, we worked Asia, Europe, and the USA. We gave all bands a try and we listened each day for each area of the world. Finally, after 6 days we made 14,550 QSOs in CW and SSB, and gave many a new country on different bands. I thank the Europeans for their patience when I asked them to

standby.

We would like to express immense gratitude to the staff of the ICGB office and to Mr. Rodrigues and Mr. Soumaré for their help and friendship during our stay. We enjoyed Guinea-Bissau and will miss the fine people.

A word of thanks to DG0ZB, DJ2AA, DJ3HJ, DL6GV, G3NUG, GM3YTS, and W4WMQ. Thanks also to CDXC, EUDXF, GDXF, GMDXG, INDEXA and Yaesu-Germany.

New Life Members.....

W2DBA	WA5AA	JL1RML	W6AQ	W4PJV	AD4LX
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Extra Help Provided By.....

LA8CJ	N7SQU	DJ9ZB	N6GDS	W5XYL	W1WW
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WD6EYD	KC9WQ	KF2XF	AC2G	K1XJ	W4PJI
VE2WY	KM4LS	and	XE2EED		

Rotuma

Ten Years, Five Operations by Ron Wright, ZL1AMO

Over the past ten years I have been to Rotuma 5 times in the odd years of '91, '93, '95, '97, and '99. My first visit in October, '91, lasted only 1 week because after only 4 days of operating my IC-735 broke down. In spite of this I made 2,500 QSOs, a good mixture of SSB and CW plus some RTTY.

The next visit was in June, '93. Everything went fine except I had trouble getting fuel and food. I remember being continually hungry. I left after 10 days and 3,260 QSOs.

The next trip was in October, '95. The fuel supply was even worse this time. In fact, there was no fuel for the locals to run their cars and even the school bus could not get the kids to the various schools. On this occasion I had traveled to the island by a small boat and found some reasonable accommodations where my host had some fuel for his generator. My host,

Yangi, was the local beer supplier and needed to keep his coolers running. This QTH, called "Rocky Point," was hanging out over the sea on the side of a cliff face so it was difficult to erect the antennas and even worse trying to fix something for the top bands. Cooking was done over an open fire and much of the time the weather was awful. After a week of this I decided to pack-up. I flew back to Fiji rather than wait for the returning ship. The log contained only 2,400 QSOs.

In November, '97, I returned to Rotuma once again and stayed at the old QTH at Fapufa. This time I was able to hire a 3 kw petrol generator.

A new store about a 3-mile walk away had a good stock of food and supplies. I still had a problem getting fuel supplies from time to time; otherwise, all went well. Band conditions were not the best, especially during daylight hours. I did manage to erect an inverted vee for 160m; however, once again, the ever-present storms made hearing any signals impossible. So, after 1 week, only 2,780 QSOs.

My last visit to Rotuma was in December, '99. This time I found a new QTH and hoped for better success on 160m. Unfortunately, better food and a more reliable power source did not help much on 160m. I had good propagation to EU allowing many QSOs on SSB/CW/RTTY. This visit lasted ten days with 4,000 QSOs, 3.5 through 28 MHz. Perhaps I will get it right next time for 160m.

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by
Wayne Mills, N7NG

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